

2014 Statewide Field Test of Smarter Balanced Assessment Frequently Asked Questions

What is Montana's "Double-Testing Waiver"?

In November 2011, the Montana Board of Public Education adopted the Montana Common Core Standards, replacing our previous English language arts and mathematics standards. The new standards are higher and clearer than Montana's previous standards and are focused on developing critical thinking skills and applying what students are learning to the real world. These standards are officially being implemented across the state this school year. In order to measure how Montana students are meeting the new standards, Montana has joined with 24 states in developing assessments with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

The Office of Public Instruction has been granted a testing waiver from the U.S. Department of Education in order to avoid double-testing of Montana students this school year and to allow schools to smoothly transition to a new, online statewide assessment in 2015. Without this waiver, Montana students would have been tested on our old standards as well as participating in a field test of the Smarter Balanced assessment, which is aligned to our new standards.

The double-testing waiver request outlines the following: 1) All Montana students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 will take the full form Smarter Balanced field test with the exception of qualifying students with disabilities, who will take the CRT Alternate assessment; 2) The current Science CRT assessment and Science CRT Alternate will continue to be given to grades 4, 8, and 10; 3) AYP determinations from 2013 will roll forward for 2014; and 4) In the 2014-2015 school year, the new Smarter Balanced assessment as well as the state science assessment will be given to all required grades and be used to determine Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for all schools.

What is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) is a multi-state organization working together to develop next-generation assessments that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. The Smarter Balanced assessment is a computer adaptive year-end assessment where each student's test is customized based on his or her performance throughout the test. The new assessment will be used for state and federal accountability purposes beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

The Smarter Balanced system will:

- Align with the Montana Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics;
- Focus on supporting teachers' instructional practice and implementation of new standards;

- Provide a comprehensive reporting system on classroom practices and student progress for teachers, administrators, students and parents;
 - Ensure every student is able to show what they know and can do to meet new standards; and
 - Offer classroom formative assessment processes and tools, as well as computer adaptive interim and summative assessments.
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How have Montanans participated in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

Montana is a governing state, which means representatives from our state participate in all Smarter Balanced decisions. Additionally, Montana educators from K-12 and higher education are participating in workgroups which address topics such as: item development, formative assessment practices leadership and professional learning, math assessment, accessibility to assessment, and technology.

What is a field test?

A field test is a test of the test, not the students. It is a trial run of the assessment system to help ensure the assessments are valid, reliable, and fair for all students.

The field test serves several purposes:

Quality Assurance: The field test will evaluate the performance of more than 20,000 assessment items and performance tasks—as well as the performance of the online testing system. For test developers, the field test will show which questions work well and which ones need to be improved so that they contribute to a fair and accurate assessment of student achievement.

Achievement Standards: Data from the field test will allow Smarter Balanced to set preliminary achievement standards in summer 2014. These achievement standards will indicate whether or not students are on track to achieve college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics.

Test Administration: For member states, the field test provides an opportunity to make sure technology systems and administration logistics are ready for implementation of the assessment system in the 2014-15 school year.

What is a performance task?

Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and activities that are connected to a single theme or scenario. These activities are meant to measure depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items.

Performance tasks in reading, writing, and mathematics will be part of the Smarter Balanced

summative, year-end assessment. The performance tasks will be delivered by computer (but will not be computer adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete.

What is a computer adaptive assessment?

Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills a student has mastered.

Computer adaptive tests are typically shorter than paper-and-pencil assessments because fewer questions are required to accurately determine each student's achievement level. These tests are also more precise in terms of the results for an individual student's knowledge and abilities. The assessments draw from a large bank of questions, and since students receive different questions based on their responses, test items are more secure and can be used for a longer period of time.

Who will score the written responses and the performance tasks?

Some items can be scored automatically; many will be hand-scored by professionally trained readers.

Who will take the Smarter Balanced Field Test?

In spring 2014, Montana public school and private accredited school students in grades 3-8 and 11 will participate in the Smarter Balanced field test in English language arts and mathematics instead of the current CRT. In addition, a small sample of students in grades 9 and 10 will participate in the high school assessment.

Who will take the CRT Alternate in 2014?

In spring 2014, students who qualify for the alternate assessment will participate in the paper-and-pencil CRT Alternate in reading, math and science. Students must have an IEP and meet eligibility guidelines that are provided to IEP teams by OPI. The testing window for the CRT Alternate test is February 17-March 25, 2014.

In 2015, students who qualify for the alternate will participate in a new alternate aligned to the Common Core State Standards and developed by the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), of which Montana is a member. A small percentage of Montana students who qualify for the alternate assessment will participate in the field test for the new alternate in the spring of 2014 with full implementation in 2015.

Will accommodations be available for students with IEP's participating in the field test?

The IEP team will identify the accommodations and supports for a student. A school system or school administrator will upload the required accommodations into the Smarter Balanced system. In most cases, the accommodations will be embedded in the online system. Smarter has developed a manual of guidelines, [“Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines,”](#) for use by test administrators and IEP teams.

Will calculators be permitted?

The parts of the test that permit calculator use will include an embedded on-screen digital calculator. This tool is only allowed on specific items for which it would be appropriate. It is a good idea for students to practice using the calculators on their computers so they can get used to them.

Will my child have the necessary computer skills to take the online assessment?

Using the practice tests that are online will help schools determine what computer skills students need. In addition, in late January, schools will also have access to a training test. This test is shorter than the field test. It has been specifically designed to provide students an opportunity to practice using the various computer skills and expose them to the full array of available supports and/or accommodations.

It is anticipated that some students may see on-screen technologies they may not be familiar with. Allowing students the opportunity to experience the field test in 2014 before the official Smarter Balanced assessment in 2015 is another benefit of the testing waiver.

How long will students have to take the test?

While the Smarter Balanced assessment is untimed, each subject area is estimated to take 3-4 hours to complete. Students will not be timed out, and the test can be paused and resumed later. However, questions that have been answered already cannot be revisited after a student saves and leaves a session. Students may take the field test over multiple days.

When is the testing window for the Smarter Balanced Field Test?

The Smarter Balanced assessment window will be administered in a 10 to 12 week window at the end of the school year. The 2014 Montana field test window is March 18 – May 14, 2014. Because many school systems begin and end the year at different times, the test window may be different for each system.

Are there any changes to the science assessment?

The Smarter Balanced assessment does not have a science component. Montana students will continue to take the paper-and-pencil Science CRT and Science CRT Alternate in grades 4, 8, and 10.

The testing window for the Science CRT is March 3-25, 2014. Schools will receive a small shipment of the science testing materials in February. Schools will follow the same test security and administration procedures as in past years.

Will the OPI, schools or parents receive test scores from the field test?

Because the field test is a “test of the test,” students, parents, schools and the state will not receive scores.

By “testing the test”, students and schools will have the opportunity to provide feedback to Smarter Balanced about Montana’s needs for the assessment. Montana’s waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education requires full participation in the field test.

What should my school be doing to prepare for the field test?

Schools can prepare for the field test by:

- Building a district/school Smarter Team which includes members of administration, the test coordinator, IT support, special needs, and data staffs;
 - Using the technology readiness tools provided by OPI and Smarter;
 - Using the online practice tests and the training tests; and
 - Continuing to focus on implementing Montana’s new English and math standards.
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How is Montana going to measure accountability from a school, district and state level?

For state and federal accountability purposes, Montana’s waiver to the U.S. Department of Education states that Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for a school and district will be carried forward from the 2012-2013 school year.

Teachers continue to provide the best information to parents for assessing an individual child’s progress over the course of a school year.

How much will the Smarter Balanced Assessment cost?

Smarter Balanced has released cost estimates for its assessments that include expenses for ongoing research and development of the assessment system, as well as test administration and scoring. The full suite of summative, interim, and formative assessments is estimated to cost \$29 per student.

These costs are less than the amount that two-thirds of the Consortium’s member states currently pay, including Montana. Montana’s previous statewide assessment cost approximately \$32 per student.

For additional information regarding the Smarter Balanced field test:

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